Breaking the silence
When silence explodes

Word power

In a muddled, confused, and chaotic world, we sometimes long for the inner peace of solitude and silence.

Max Ehrmann, (1872-1945), a poet and lawyer wrote the famous Desiderata poem in the 1920's.

It's deep and powerful opening states: "Go placidly amid the noise and haste and remember what peace there may be in silence."

Max too, attested to the power of silence. But silence can be explosive too, especially when abused, disregarded or enforced. And when it does so, like wild fires it so easily degenerates into unmanageable levels.

Prior to the 1982 coup, Kenyans were forcibly silenced. With so much frustration boiling within, the famous historical coup came to being. A time when speaking about rights was left only to those who dare do so, Kenyans had to contend with what was given or perhaps should I call it forced upon them?

The power of writing was too well censored. Several years later, Kenyans can boast of reasonable levels of freedom that have broken the silence. Shiraz Durrani, poet and author too had this desire boiling within him and when it exploded, it not only led to torture, but his eventual self-imposed exile too.

Several years later, Shiraz can boast of his freedom to express himself through his recently released book "Never be silent-Publishing & Imperialism in Kenya." For a detailed account, read more on page three.

The menu too, is rich with our culture, with special emphasis on the Turkana cultural festival whose message to all Kenyans and especially this week has been "Najivunia kuwa Mkenya."

- Backing government spokes person Alfred Mutua, his words, actions accompanied by stickers and posters, let us all be proud of our country. We’ve come along way–haven’t we?
Shiraz Durrani on: The journey to ‘Never be Silent’

Feted as a national best seller, “Never be Silent” has a long history to its being. It all began when the author published ‘alarm- ing’ reports on the history of publishing and the anti-imperialist struggle in Kenya, that saw him thrust into the infamous nyayo house chambers, consequently leading to his self imposed exile in the UK. Over 20 years later, his dream has become reality - Shiraz has finally broken the silence.

“‘Never Be Silent’ was the result of a natural progression of work I was already doing with my other books,” Durrani says. “I was writing about the history of publishing in Kenya, and I was also writing about the struggle against colonialism.”

But the journey to publication was far from smooth. Durrani faced numerous challenges, including censorship and political persecution. He was forced to go into exile in the UK in 1984, where he continued to write and publish his work. Despite these obstacles, Durrani persevered and his book eventually appeared in 2020.

Durrani’s book tells the story of the struggle for independence in Kenya, and the role of publishing in that struggle. The book also explores the challenges of publishing in a country that was closed off to the outside world, and the role of the underground press in keeping the flame of resistance burning.

“I decided to look at the history of mass communication and publishing to see what lessons could be learned from those experiences,” Durrani says. “I then presented a short version of my paper at the workshop.”

The issue of publishing then became an obsession. The more he read the fascinating struggles in the information field that unfolded with each new angle, the more his desire to explore the totality of anti-imperialist struggles in Kenya grew.

“I needed to devote plenty of time on research at the Kenya National Archives as well as the national office fades, but the research only seemed to go on forever, and in a surprising twist of events, it then degenerated into a political issue that led to my exile.”

In reality, the 1980’s saw the underground opposition to KANU generate every field of activity, led by December Twelve Movement. The latter published its own underground newspaper, ‘Pambana,’ which had a wide circulation throughout the Country.

“Students from the University of Nairobi then joined hands with this underground resistance, to attack the regime in power” he says, “and for the first time, I came out openly on my involvement with the underground movement.”

The group approached him to help in some aspects of their publication - the University Platform. “They also wanted me to write articles on the history of Kenya from a working class point of view.”

Durrani remembers providing three articles, two drawn from research on the history of publishing. One was on Pio Gama Pinto and the other on Kimathi. The third was an article he had written as part of the publicity of the progressive play, Kimwele, Maji Maji, directed by Naiika Durrani and staged to full houses at the Education Theatre by the Takito Arts group of the University of Nairobi creative wing.

A crucial year following the 1982 coup, all three articles proved popular. They were a message to those active in the struggle that despite the jailings and exiling, progressive forces were still active in Kenya.

“It was in this national context that my article on Pio Gama Pinto was published.”

According to the book, several important files from major ministries are missing from the Kenya National archives. Durrani advocates for the need to trace them from Britain.

The book explains how the colonial government destroyed the files by burning them up on the streets of Nairobi in order to hide the truth about inhuman leadership in Africa.

The book opens with the history of publishing in Kenya, giving a detailed history of struggles. Shiraz adequately draws the strong link between publishing in this Country and Jeevanjee.

He says that the colonialists used their own newspaper to fight the black man’s struggle through propaganda and financial support from their homeland. Chapter two gives an overview of the resistance of Nationalists and settlers, with special emphasis on colonial government publications, church publications, south Asian publications and African publications. While chapter three deals with the Consolidations of the working class with regard to these publications.

The rest of the book is arranged in a fashionable manner, adequately revealing the hidden history of the MauMau revolutionary struggle as well as the role of the overseas support for Kenya revolution.

The book later looks at Independence and national development.
When Shiraz Durrani, then a University of Nairobi librarian, published an article on Pio Gama Pinto, in September 1984, life took on a new turn for him.

First, it sparked a prolonged debate among members of parliament.

Then, the following week, when he was due to publish more articles on the same, including that on Dedan Kimathi, his ambition was cut short. Police arrested him and plunged him into the infamous Nyayo house chambers for questioning. Consequently, he was forced to flee into exile in the UK.

The writer, who is still unsure of returning to the country says he fled following threats from police officers, who accused him of offending the big fish in government.

To date, London is home to this reputable writer.

Shiraz Durrani’s literary skills were re-awakened recently after a prolonged period of silence, stretching to slightly over two decades. Indeed, Shiraz has broken the silence.

He is back with a bang. On course is the recent launch of his historical book, also regarded as Kenya’s National bestseller: ‘Never be Silent.’

In this book, Durrani vividly explores development in Kenya after Uhuru, with special emphasis on the leadership of the first two regimes under the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and immediate former president, Moi, respectively. Something that was then perceived to be so unpalatable.

The idea of writing this book was born when a group of librarians at the University of Nairobi were searching for relevance in the information field in Kenya by organizing a workshop at the Kabete campus, the University of Nairobi in 1979.

The issue of publishing then became an obsession. The more he read the fascinating stories in the information field that unfolded with each new angle, the more his desire to explore the totality of anti-imperialist struggles in Kenya grew.

“I needed to devote plenty of time on research at the Kenya National Archives as well as the colonial office files, but the research only seemed to go on forever, and in a surprising twist of events, it then degenerated into a political issue that led to my exile.”

In reality, the 1980’s saw the underground opposition to KANU penetrate every field of activity, led by ‘December Twelve Movement’. The latter published its own underground newspaper, “Pambana,” which had a wide circulation throughout the country.

“Students from the University of Nairobi then joined hands with this underground resistance, to attack the regime in power” he says, “and for the first time, I came out openly on my involvement with the underground movement.”

The group approach him to help in some aspects of their publication-the University Platform. “They also wanted me to write articles on the history of Kenya from a working class point of view.”

Durrani remembers providing three articles, two drawn from research on the history of publishing, one on Pio Gama Pinto and the other on Kimathi. The third was an article he had written as part of the publicity of the progressive play, Kinjeketile-Majaji Maji, directed by Nalati Durrani and staged to full houses at the Education Theatre by the Takhto Arts group of the University of Nairobi creative wing.

A crucial year following the 1982 coup, all three articles proved popular. They were a message to those active in the struggle that despite the jailing and exile, progressive forces were still active in Kenya.

“It was in this national context that my article on Pio Gama Pinto was published.”

According to the book, several important files from major ministries are missing from the Kenya National archives, Durin advocates for the need to trace them from Britain.

The book explains how the colonial government destroyed the files by burning them up on the streets of Nairobi in order to hide the truth about inhumane leadership in Africa.

The book opens with the history of publishing in Kenya, giving a detailed history of struggles. Shiraz adequately draws the strong link between publishing in this Country and Jevanjee.

He says that the colonials used their own newspaper to fight the black man’s struggle through propaganda and financial support from their homeland.

Chapter two gives an overview of the resistance of Nationalists and settlers, with special emphasis on colonial government publications, church publications, and African publications. While chapter three deals with the Consolidations of the working class with regard to these publications.

The rest of the book is arranged in a fashioned manner, adequately revealing the hidden history of the Mau Mau revolutionary struggle as well as the role of the overseas support for Kenya revolution.

The book later looks at Independence and neocolonialism with regard to the struggle for Kenya’s future.

Since his exile, Shiraz Durrani first worked at Hackneyend Merton public libraries before taking up teaching as a senior lecturer in Information Management, Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University. To date, that is his job.

He has promised to come up with other materials on the historical background of this Country.